

Vergennes Township

A Place Where People Like to Live
www.vergennestwp.org



10381 Bailey Dr., P.O. Box 208, Lowell, MI 49331

897-5671

Hours: M, W, F – 9 A.M.–3 P.M.



SUMMER 2009

SUPERVISOR: TIM WITTENBACH
TREASURER: JEAN HOFFMAN
CLERK: MARI STONE
TRUSTEES: VERN NAUTA
ALLAN BAIRD

**Township Board Meetings are held the third Monday of every month at 7:00 P.M. in the Township Hall.
Planning Commission Meetings are held the first Monday of every month at 7:00 P.M. in the Township Hall.**

CLERK'S CORNER

by Mari Stone, Vergennes Township Clerk

At the Crossroad....

I hope this finds you enjoying this lazy summer season. I am determined to enjoy it this year, as it is an off-year for elections, and I can schedule getaways when they are good for those I am planning to getaway with! But first, an update on a project that has been on my desk for more than a year now.

High Speed Internet Enhancement

Thanks to everyone who took the time to participate in the survey. Our consultant is formulating the results, and should have our final report by the time this newsletter comes out. We received MANY stories of "high-speed attempts" that would break your heart. We will use these personal accounts in the marketing package as a way to demonstrate our needs when it is time to apply for funding for this project. In case you are not familiar with what we have been up to, here is a summary of what we hope to get from the survey results:

The final culmination of this work will be the creation of a Township Marketing Report or Kit. The report/kit will include all relevant information needed to build a business case in which to compel service providers to engage in our market. The Market Report will include, but not be limited to, the following:

- Narrative of the historical and cultural background of Vergennes Township and its residents.
- Demographics of residents.
- Projected potential revenue models.
- Detailed street maps of the Township.
- Detailed topographical maps of the Township.
- Detailed maps of population density disbursements.
- Anecdotal narratives of resident experiences and frustrations in pursuing high speed Internet access.

The Market Report/Kit will include information necessary for service providers new to Vergennes Township as well as data that may be necessary to engage current service providers (i.e. AT&T, Comcast, etc.) in providing high speed Internet service to all Vergennes Township residents.

The report will include all materials necessary to begin requesting proposals and beginning the process of receiving bid submittals from potential ISPs.

- Community Survey--up to two rough drafts culminating in a final survey draft will be submitted. A web-based questionnaire is strongly recommended to conduct these surveys. Having said that, it is understood that the central issue of this work is the lack of Internet access. In order to ensure fair access to participation in this survey, CBD will provide a paper copy of the survey to the Township. The Township will be responsible for inputting all paper submissions onto the web-based questionnaire. CBD designs the questionnaires, assists with all related announcements and provides web presence access.
- Survey results and analysis. Full written reports of the findings are provided and presented as requested to the Township including an analysis of data. A separate Executive Summary--an abridged version of the full written report--is also provided to publicly distribute.
- High Speed Internet Market Report. Ten professionally printed and bound copies of the High Speed Internet Market Report/Kit will be provided to the Township.

Thanks to the citizen committee who has been working on this issue. Especially helpful were Mark Weber, Ryan Peel, Carol Rockwall, Nancy Rude, Ed VanTimmeren, Heather Cooper, Zach Harris, and Trent Geldersma. I hope to have some good news from a potential vendor by the time I write the winter newsletter. Have a great summer and fall!

RAILS TRAILS UPDATE

By Carolyn Kane, Chairperson
FRED MEIJER GRAND RIVER VALLEY RAIL-TRAIL & LOWELL TO GREENVILLE RAIL-TRAIL

Since first meeting in May 2007, cities, villages, townships and interested trail enthusiasts have been working together through a Community Action Committee to preserve the MidMichigan Railroad corridor from Ionia to Greenville, for the eventual development of a railtrail. Railtrails allow local communities to connect with each other. These trail corridors provide safe recreational havens for families to enjoy healthy activities, including biking, hiking, walking dogs, rollerblading and jogging. Study after study shows that these trails promote economic development, increased tourism, green space preservation, increased property values and healthier people in all the communities they touch.

Now that the Community Action Committee and its partners have successfully preserved the Ionia to Lowell corridor, our efforts are focusing on the acquisition of the route from Lowell to Greenville. The cost to purchase the 22 miles from Foreman Road in Lowell to M-57 in Greenville is \$1,300,000. Fundraising efforts for acquisition have been the highest priority for this team of hopeful trail builders. Supporting funders have been the Meijer Foundation, Frey Foundation, Lowell Area Community Fund, and Greenville Area Community Foundation. The team is currently focused on a potential Michigan Department of Transportation Enhancement Grant to complete the funding.

During the process of securing funds to purchase the corridor, letters of support from government units along the route are very helpful ensuring our success. This trail will be a welcome addition to all communities it reaches just as other trails in or near Greenville have been successful.

In the Thursday, January 29, 2009 Daily News, Jessica Dudenhofer gave an update on the progress of the new trail on the abandoned railroad bed from Greenville to Lowell. The article titled "City lists 3 trail concerns" was a welcome and timely news release on the progress of the acquisition of this corridor. Acquisition of the route is only the first step in connecting the Fred Meijer Heartland Trail, the Fred Meijer Flat River Trail south to Lowell and then east to Ionia and Owosso.

City Manager Bosanic was quoted as saying, "Significant portions of the trails in Lowell and Belding are getting purchased and developed. We would like to be treated the same." It should be pointed out that very little of the trail will actually follow rail corridors in the City of Lowell. In Lowell the Railroad is not abandoning most of the rail that goes through residential and commercial areas. This is not the case in Belding, Greenville, Saranac and Ionia. The Community Action Committee is specifically working with the Railroad to purchase the corridor that has been "railbanked" which preserves the corridor for future rail use should that ever be profitable. The portions of trail that the City Manager wants to add to the project are not railbanked and therefore not part of this purchase. Both Lowell and Belding have demonstrated their enthusiasm by providing letters of support to assist in our fundraising. It would be great if the City of Greenville would also support this project to connect communities.

As the current project coordinator for the West Michigan Trails and Greenways Coalition, I have been proud to be a part of this dynamic group of community leaders. Through their dedication, we have built partnerships and forged cooperation up and down the abandoned railroad corridor. Our strong alliance includes the Friends of Fred Meijer Heartland Trail, Friends of CIS Trail, Lowell Area Recreation Authority, Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance, Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Michigan Department of Transportation, Montcalm, Kent, and Ionia County Governments, Grand Valley Metro Council, Greenville and Lowell Area Chambers of Commerce, and 13 local government units along the corridor. As we complete the final acquisition phases and move on to trail development, we look forward to expanding our alliances to achieve the vision of the 5th longest railtrail in the United States, connecting partner communities along a unified trail system of more than 120 miles.

TAX DEFERMENT QUALIFICATIONS

To Qualify:

*Your **HOUSEHOLD INCOME** must not exceed \$40,000 and must be either

- senior citizen (62 years or older)
- paraplegic, quadriplegic
- eligible service person, eligible veteran, eligible widow or widower
- blind person
- totally and permanently disabled

*Agriculture

The forms are available in the office from Treasurer Jean Hoffman from July 1st through September 14th. The deferment period covers one year only, so you must re-apply each tax year.



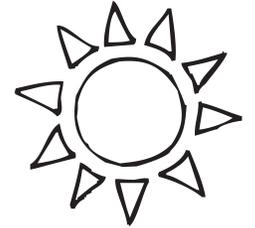
DISTRIBUTION OF TAXES



How are the taxes paid to Vergennes Township distributed?

Below you will find a breakdown of taxes that have been collected for 2008 tax year and details as to the distributions that have been made by the Treasurer's office.

Taxes disbursed to Lowell Area Schools (<i>Operating and debt</i>)	\$ 1,682,414.26
Taxes disbursed to Kent Intermediate Schools	\$ 817,292.75
Taxes disbursed to Grand Rapids Community College	\$ 311,294.44
Taxes disbursed to Kent County for State Education Tax	\$ 1,028,396.17
Taxes disbursed to Kent County (<i>Operating</i>)	\$ 932,110.12
Taxes disbursed to Kent District Library	\$ 147,175.39
Taxes disbursed to Vergennes Township	\$ 145,033.74
Total taxes collected for summer & winter 2008 taxes(industrial facility tax not included)	\$ 5,063,716.87



Treasurer Jean Hoffman



PROPOSAL A



What is Proposal A and how does it impact me?

The failing economy and the crash of the real estate market that Michigan is experiencing has led many homeowners to take a second look at their property tax bills. Residents can't help but wonder how Michigan's tax system works.

Proposal A was added to the Michigan Constitution in 1994 by a vote of the people to address how property taxes are determined. Prior to the enactment of the Proposal A, the state constitution required that every property owner pay property taxes based on the fair market value of their property. While the system insured that everyone would pay their fair share, it could be very punishing to the individual taxpayer. Whenever housing markets escalated quickly, it was not unusual for some homeowners in the community to see their tax bill jump by 20 percent or more in one year.

Significant changes to the property tax system

When Proposal A was approved, it contained two significant changes to the property tax system: The first was to significantly cut school property taxes and the second was a provision that significantly limited how quickly individual property tax bills could increase from year to year. Proposal A stated that the value of property used to calculate property taxes could not increase each year by more than the increase in inflation, or 5 percent, whichever is less, until the ownership of the property changes.

Property owners have seen the benefit from this valuation cap for years. Each year every property owner receives a statement from the township that indicates the property's State Equalized Value. This amount represents 50 percent of the current value of the property. The value is determined by the township's assessor, who is required to follow procedures established and monitored by the state. However, the more important number is the Taxable Value, which is the amount used to actually calculate property taxes. Any difference between the State Equalized Value and Taxable Value shows how Proposal A has limited your property taxes.

Inequity in the system

While Proposal A protected individual property owners, it has created inequities. When a house is sold, the new owner must pay taxes on the full value of the property, with the same cap on future assessment increases. This means a person who has owned the same home for the last 14 years is likely paying much less in property taxes than their neighbor who just moved in three years ago, even though both homes may be identical.

The newest fairness issue has been exposed with the falling housing market. Our state law that implements

Cont. on page 3



SUMMER TAX 2009



SUMMER TAXES – 2009
Jean Hoffman-Treasurer

Taxes are due on September 14th. Please mail early, as we do not accept postmarks as the due date. We cannot be responsible for any delays with the postal service. Please use the yellow return envelope provided for you in the tax statement.

If you are having difficulty in making a one-time tax payment, please feel free to make partial payments from July 1st through September 14th. You will then only have interest on the total of the unpaid taxes.

If you would like a paid receipt, please enclose the entire tax bill with a self-addressed envelope. We will return the top portion of the bill with a paid stamp on it.

Make checks payable to: Vergennes Township. Any payment received after the due date that does not have interest added will be applied as a partial payment. State law prohibits the Township from waiving these charges.

Office hours are M-W-F from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. For your convenience, there is a mail slot in the door for after-hour payments. Be sure to place a check or money order through the slot—please no cash.

It is your responsibility to make sure your taxes are paid. Pay early to avoid any interest being added to your tax bill. You can check periodically on the Vergennes Township website to see if your taxes have been posted. The web page is usually updated every two weeks. www.vergennestwp.org

Kent County has phased in 100% of their operating on the summer bill. They will only have the jail and senior millage on the winter bill.

Please check your tax statement for accuracy. If you have a mortgage company, please look under your name for the mortgage company to which the tax bill was sent. If the mortgage company is wrong, please contact me at the Township so that I can correct this.

Under "Tax Detail" on your tax statement, you will find your Principle Residence Exemption. Your P.R.E. will show you how much your tax bill has been reduced. By State of Michigan standards, you must own and occupy your property prior to May 1st of a given year and it must be the only property for which you have filed. If you feel you qualify for a P.R.E., please contact our assessor.

Have a wonderful and safe summer.



TAX BREAKDOWN



The total taxes levied at the township for the 2008 tax year was \$5,063,716.87.

The breakdown of the total taxes is:

Lowell Area Schools	34%
Kent County	18%
Kent District Library	.03%
Kent Inter. Sch. Dist.	16%
GR Comm. College	.06%
State Education Tax	20%
Vergennes Township	.03%

FOR EVERY \$1.00 YOU PAY IN PROPERTY TAXES

\$.76 GOES TO EDUCATION

(INCLUDES LOWELL AREA SCHOOLS, KENT INTERMEDIATE & COMMUNITY COLLEGE & STATE EDUCATION)

\$.21 GOES TO THE COUNTY OPERATIONS

(INCLUDES GENERAL OPERATIONS, JAIL, SENIOR CITIZENS & DISTRICT LIBRARY)

\$.03 GOES TO THE TOWNSHIP

(FOR GENERAL OPERATIONS)



PROPOSAL A



Cont. from page 2

Proposal A directs that the Taxable Value must increase by the rate of inflation any time the Taxable Value on a piece of property is less than its State Equalized Value. This occurs even if the value of the property is decreasing. This continues until the State Equalized Value and Taxable Value are equal, at which point any further decline results in real property tax reductions. This leads to the question asked by many: Why did my property taxes go up when the value of my home just went down?

As administrators of the property tax system, the township can only point to the constitution and the decision made in 1994 by the residents of this state that a predictable property tax assessment was more important than an equitable assessment. The economy is hitting everyone. Some property owners—generally those who have owned their homes for years—are seeing increases in their property tax bills and many are seeing real declines. Local governments also feel the strain and have been struggling for years to maintain services due to declining funding from the state. The expected decline in property tax collections—our most important revenue source—simply means we must also do more with less, just like our residents are doing. It doesn't diminish our responsibility to maintain a community that is a great place to live, work and raise our children. We intend to continue to do what we can to provide you with the services that you expect in a cost-efficient way.